SECTION 10.20 THE EXIT INTERVIEW PROCESS
Last Update: 02/15

Introduction

Turnover happens. It is a fact of worklife. However, with a shrinking and thus more competitive labor market, it is important for the employer to know why employees are leaving in order to better attract and retain productive employees. Exit interviews and surveys are a major component of an organization's retention program.

Employees leave their jobs for a variety of reasons. They may be dissatisfied with their current job. Or, other non-work related reasons, like the relocation of a spouse, may be the cause.

An exit interview can be helpful in unscrambling the work-related factors from non-work-related factors.

Why do exit interviews?

In reviewing the process for conducting exit interviews below, keep the following in mind:

- Exit interviews provide feedback about organizational health and trends management may need to monitor to continue to retain productive employees.
- Exit interviews provide feedback to management regarding supervisory strengths and areas for improvement.
- Exit interviews provide documentation verifying the reason the employee is leaving and may prevent the State from having to pay an unemployment claim.

Exit Interview Process

1. Inform management, supervisors, and employees about the exit interview process in staff meetings or through staff communication vehicles.
    - So they know what to expect and why it is important.
    - To enlist their assistance in making improvements to the process.
    - To manage employees' expectations so they are not caught off guard with the process and feel threatened by it.

2. The interview should be conducted by a non-biased third party.
    - The supervisor, though most familiar with the employee's work, may intentionally or unintentionally intimidate the departing employee or in some other way cause them to modify their responses.
    - The interviewer should be able to listen without judging.
    - The interviewer should not attempt to defend the organization, even when the employee is very negative.

3. Send the Exit Interview Questionnaire, Part I form (CFN 552-0711), to the employee several days before their last day on the job. Fill in the questionnaire to indicate to whom it should be returned and by when. If feasible, set up a time and place for a face-to-face interview to go over the completed questionnaire. Face-to-face interviews allow for additional probing or following up on certain perspectives stated by the employee in more depth. And, in a face-to-face interview, you have the opportunity to observe non-verbal clues the departing employee may exhibit that relate to their departure. Explain again why the exit interview is considered important and what you expect to gain from it. Also, explain how the employee may benefit from it.

    Although the follow-up interview is advisable, not all state employment situations lend themselves to doing it. Some employees are based in locations away from where a third party could readily interview them. Some are field positions. This is a situational call for the agency.

4. Assure that the employee has adequate time to attend the interview and that the supervisor is aware when it is taking place.

5. The person conducting the exit interview should encourage the departing employee to contact him or her if they have questions rather than discuss the interview with the supervisor.

6. The intent of the interview is to find out as much as possible about why the employee is leaving. If they are leaving for another organization, obtain details about the new job and why the employee found it attractive.

7. Take notes. Not only does this demonstrate that the process is taken seriously, it documents the specifics heard from the employee.

8. Share the information received with the supervisor and collectively with the rest of the organization.

    - Make sure the departing employee knows that the information may be shared with the supervisor and why: because it will reinforce positive attributes and it will help him or her learn about areas where improvement in supervisory style or working conditions may be needed.

9. Develop a method for compiling the information received so it can be used in the aggregate to identify organizational issues that should receive follow-up attention or factors that may be contributing to turnover. Keep information gained from the exit interview separate from the departing employee's personnel file.

10. Resist the urge to form immediate conclusions about the organization's health based on the comments of one or two employees. Except in rare circumstances where poor supervisory decisions or actions should be checked into immediately, exit interview information is a good indicator of trends to watch more closely.

11. Ask the departing employee for feedback about the exit interview process itself after you have concluded the interview so you can continue to improve and refine it.

12. Develop a tickler system so that 30 days following the employee's departure, the Exit Interview Questionnaire, Part II form (CFN 552-0712) can be sent to the employee along with a stamped return envelope. This follow-up questionnaire is used for a couple reasons. First, the information is obtained from the employee after a period of separation from the job and the agency, the assumption being that the former employee will have gained a certain perspective about the job and former working conditions that may not have been as evident while still employed by your agency. The other reason is that, if the employee has left employment with your agency for another job, they will have had an opportunity to experience the new job and may be in a better position to compare the two situations.

13. DAS-HRE also sends a departure survey, which is different from the Exit Information Questionnaire, Parts I and II, to departed employees after they have been gone approximately 60 days. This may seem like a duplicative process, but there are at least two reasons for doing this. The first reason is that DAS-HRE may be perceived by the departed employee to be a more neutral third party with whom they can share information they did not feel comfortable sharing with their former employing agency. Although self-disclosure may be perceived as optional with the Exit Information Questionnaire, Parts I and II (both ask for the employee's name and signature, but they are not required), the DAS-HRE Departure Survey does not ask for the employee's name and signature. The other reason is that the DAS-HRE Departure Survey is intended for the consistent collection of departure information so that overall workforce trends may be tracked over a period of years.